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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 303rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 17 September 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Badji ..... (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Statement by the Chairman

2. **The Chairman** said that since the Committee's previous meeting on 3 July, the President of the United States of America had announced a forthcoming international meeting in 2007 in which the participation of Israel, the Palestinians and regional neighbours was envisaged under the chairmanship of the American Secretary of State. Preliminary meetings between the Israeli and Palestinian Prime Ministers had been held, with a focus on current and final status issues.

3. Since that date, the Security Council had been briefed by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority in the context of its consideration of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. In addition, the Committee had organized the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace at the European Parliament in Brussels on 30 and 31 August 2007. The Conference had generated media attention, some of which had been negative, and the Bureau had issued a formal response.

4. The situation in Gaza was increasingly desperate. The area had remained isolated since Hamas had taken over in mid-June. Main crossings remained closed and alternative crossings were insufficient to bring in adequate commercial and humanitarian supplies. Poverty levels were close to 80 per cent and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was overwhelmed by the numbers of people in need of emergency assistance.

Election of the Rapporteur of the Committee

5. **The Chairman** said that Mr. Camilleri, the former Permanent Representative of Malta and Rapporteur of the Committee, had left New York to take up a new assignment and nominated Mr. Borg, the new Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, for the office of Rapporteur. Mr. Borg was a skilled and experienced diplomat with extensive knowledge on the question of Palestine and other United Nations issues. Through his involvement with the work of the Committee for some years, he was familiar with the intricacies of the Palestinian question.

6. *Mr. Borg (Malta) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

7. **Mr. Borg** (Malta), Rapporteur, thanked Committee members for electing him to a post that had been held by representatives of his country since the establishment of the Committee in 1975. He had been on the Committee 20 years earlier, as the Deputy Permanent Representative of Malta and had continued to follow the activities of the Committee after leaving New York. As Rapporteur, he would strive to be a voice of moderation, and to emphasize the importance of the United Nations for the peaceful resolution of disputes and the need to respect the international rule of law. He would work with the Bureau and Members of the Committee and with the Division for Palestinian Rights in order to ensure that the activities of the Committee continued smoothly and requested the support of the members in that regard. He saluted the Permanent Observer for Palestine, Mr. Mansour, for his dedication and support of the work of the Committee and enjoined its members to assist him in his difficult task of promoting the interests of the Palestinian people.

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem

8. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine), said that he had delivered a lengthy statement on 29 August 2007 to the Security Council on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem and expressed Palestine's hope that the fall conference might lead towards a two-State solution. The independent State of Palestine had been waiting 40 years to be born. In addition, he had continued to send a weekly letter to the President of the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly, providing detailed updates on the continuing crimes of Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people. He was sure that all Committee members had followed the Security Council debate in which 32 speakers had participated.

9. On average, the Israeli occupying authorities killed more than 50 people every month in the

Occupied Palestinian Territories by extrajudicial execution, including women and children, and injured close to 100 people. That established trend was likely to continue. Moreover, the trend of illegal confiscation of Palestinian land and illegal construction and expansion of settlements was also continuing and the settler population was increasing substantially by the day.

10. With complete disregard for the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and the statements made before the General Assembly, Israel was continuing with its illegal construction of the separation wall. The Palestinian people did sometimes receive encouragement in their struggle, as in the case of the village of Bil'in, which had achieved a small victory in the Israeli Supreme Court: the site of the wall had been adjusted in order to return approximately 250 acres of land to the village. That was one example of how the peaceful struggle of the Palestinian people, spearheaded by the peaceful demonstrators of Bil'in, was producing results, even though the Israeli occupying army continued to use violence and to injure from 5 to 25 individuals every week in demonstrations against the wall. Bil'in was just one example of the violence used against Palestinians who were practising peaceful disobedience and resistance to occupation.

11. Despite the talks between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, there were still about 550 checkpoints that hindered the movement of people in the West Bank. Such a large number of checkpoints in a small area made life very difficult for the inhabitants. For example, Israel, the occupying Power, claimed that Jerusalem was open to all religions, and yet, in the first week of the holy month of Ramadan, Muslim Palestinian men aged 45 years and under and women aged 35 years and under were not allowed to enter the city to pray in the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Christian Palestinians from Bethlehem, Ramallah and other areas were also affected. Israel showed no signs of changing its policy, and the Minister of Defence was speaking of plans and studies to see how to reduce the number of checkpoints in the West Bank — an exercise which could take a long period of time. Meanwhile, the incursions and attacks against the civilian population continued.

12. If peace was to be achieved, some of the restrictions on Palestinians would have to be lifted. The occupying Power could not continue to levy taxes illegally, maintain checkpoints, imprison thousands of people and restrict their movement, prevent Palestinians from praying in Jerusalem and build and expand settlements, while confiscating even more land through the construction of an illegal wall. President Abbas was continuing active negotiations with Prime Minister Olmert in good faith with a view to achieving a breakthrough in the political process and preparing for an international conference in November in Washington D.C. The Palestinians and the Arabs should all be well prepared to work for that conference in a constructive spirit, taking into account the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab peace initiative, the road map and the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace. They should be ready to deal with final status issues so that the Palestinian State could be born. It was clear from the Arab peace initiative and many United Nations resolutions that the Palestinian State should extend to all of the areas occupied by Israel in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and that a just and agreed solution with regard to refugees should be formulated in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (1948).

13. The process that was to begin in the autumn should lead to achievement of the objective of a two-State solution. Towards the end of September, many meetings of Arab and other leaders would be held at the United Nations Headquarters and elsewhere in New York to lay the groundwork for a successful conference. United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would be visiting the Middle East region in the next few days and would surely return with more details about the Conference agenda, date and participants. Further details on developments in the Middle East and preparations for the Conference should be available when the Committee met in October.

Report of the Chairman on the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, 30 and 31 August 2007, European Parliament, Brussels

14. **The Chairman** said that the theme of the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace had been "Civil society and parliamentarians working together for peace in the Middle East", in keeping with General Assembly resolutions 61/22 and 61/23 of 1 December 2006. The turnout had been impressive; the delegation from the Committee had been comprised of

Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz of Cuba, Vice-Chairman of the Committee Ambassador Hamidon Ali of Malaysia, Ambassador Riyad Mansour of Palestine and himself, as Chairman of the Committee and head of the delegation.

15. The Conference had consisted of an opening session, two plenary sessions, five workshops and a closing session. It had been opened by Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who had read out a message on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The Chairman had made a statement on behalf of the Committee.

16. In the ensuing plenary sessions and workshops, presentations had been made by 35 experts, including 9 Palestinians and 6 Israelis. At the end of the Conference, the Steering Committee had prepared a call to action on behalf of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine. However, numerous amendments had been made to it by the civil society participants and the Steering Committee was still in the process of finalizing the document.

17 While in Brussels, the Committee delegation had held meetings in connection with the Conference with Ambassador Jon Grauls, Secretary-General of the Belgian Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Christian F. Jouret, Head of the Middle East and the Mediterranean Unit of the Council of the European Union, Ms. Belen Martinez Carbonell, Member of the Cabinet of the European Commissioner for External Relations Ferrero-Waldner, and Mr. Leonidas Tezapsidis, Head of the Near East Unit of the European Commission, during which they had exchanged valuable and useful views on the issue, focusing on the role of Europe, and had called for future cooperation with the Committee.

18. In accordance with established practice, the report of the International Conference would be issued, in due course, as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights and would also be posted on the website maintained by the Division.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.